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ABSTRACT

Teaching students to become readers who can work with an author to "build" a text requires a better understanding of the nature of the author-reader relationship. This essay discusses the rights and responsibilities of that relationship by presenting writing and reading as a rhetorical situation--an interaction between author, reader/learner, text, and the world--that involves the structuring of meaning. The point of providing students with opportunities to structure ideas through writing is to help them develop schemata for idea structuring, which they can transfer to the reading situation. With these schemata, readers can uncover the author's structure more successfully, or impose their own structure on a text. The text, rather than bearing meaning explicitly, represents meaning or gives clues to meaning. The author must provide enough clues for the reader, and the reader must appropriately use the author's clues. It is possible that students who have previously experienced various text types by writing them will be better readers and recallers of those same text types. (HTH)

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Developing Young Composers' Sense of Craft For Reading and Writing: First Principles

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I. Introduction

The focus of this text is on several kinds of skills young composers need to become craftsmen: the interpersonal skills needed for establishing appropriate author-reader relationships and the ideational skills needed for making points and establishing idea relationships. Perhaps the best way to begin this discussion is to use a building or constructing metaphor and consider our young composers as members of a guild for constructing meanings of texts and our classrooms as places where apprentices, journeymen and masters are learning and perfecting their skills so that they can become authors and readers in charge of construction -- master builders of meaning. Young composers then can be authors or readers.

Let us take a close look at the title of this text, "The Young Composers' Sense of Craft for Reading and Writing," beginning with the word Composing. We can analyze the word by looking at the meaning for each part. The er means one who, pose means puts or places and com means together; a composer is one who puts or places things (ideas or people, one's self, or others) in some kind of an arrangement or alignment or relationship. The people put in arrangement or relationships can be characters in a story or authors and readers. The ideas put in an arrangement or relationship can be main points or ideas or subordinate points or ideas. Composing involves a social behavior component and a conceptual, ideational component, each component equally important and interacting with the other.

There are degrees of composing ability. Some composers do a better job than others -- some have mastered the craft, some haven't. A craft is a skill or technique that has been taught and learned. It is not magic or mystery. A craftsman is a person considered an artist in regard to technique, form,

and relationships -- an artist is one who has control and who is in charge of technique, form, and relationships so that a work of art is the result. Technique, form, and relationship have been defined as discovery of meaning through control - control learned, not acquired magically and mysteriously. A composer craftsman has reached the level of master builder -- through control of technique, form and relationships. That means control over author-reader and idea techniques and relationships.

Our goal as educators is to turn out as many composer craftsmen as possible. We want authors and readers who can be together. co-master builders in charge of text construction. To do that, however, we need to better understand the nature of the author-reader relationship (for this has been an area overlooked by both educators and researchers) as well as the nature of idea relationships, making points and form. We need to demystify reading and writing by teaching the craft of composing -- putting together authors, readers, and ideas in appropriate arrangments and relationships and becoming aware of how far our young composers have progressed in learning their craft. A recent study of third graders (Tierney, Crismore, Giacobbe, 1983) attempted to discover third graders' perceptions of the nature of the author-reader and idea relationships and how many skills and techniques they had. The findings indicate that we often underestimate how much young composers know about author/reader and idea relationships and how many skills they have, but depends on what their teachers know and can do as composers.

II. The Nature of Author/Reader Relationships

A. The Interpersonal Function of Language

Some of the questions teachers and researchers can ask are "To what extent are the actions or reactions of an author and a reader dependent upon the role

each assumes in relation to one another in generating, understanding, and enjoying a wide range of texts" and "To what extent are a reader's comprehension, inferencing and remembering efforts tied to both the text message and its author and to reader attitudes?"

The questions asked about authors and readers and written language depend on how the questioners view language. Psychologists view language as knowledge and are interested in the conceptual, ideational aspect of language -- ideas and content. But sociologists, anthropologists, and rhetoricians view language as behavior and are interested in the situational context, social, and interpersonal aspects of language.

> Halliday and Hasan have defined the interpersonal aspect as follows:
>
> The interpersonal component is concerned with the social expressive and conative functions of language, with expressing the speaker's angle: his attitudes and judgments, his encoding of the role relationships into the situation, and his motive in saying anything at all. We can summarize these by saying that the ideational component represents the speaker in his role as observer, while the interpersonal component represents the speaker in his role as intruder. (pp. 26-27)

For sociolinguists and rhetoricians, then, language is a situated, communicative act, and learning from text requires a rhetorical, communicative framework that includes author, reader/learner, text, and the world as components along with their interactions. Their belief is that if one element is altered, the other elements will necessarily be altered as well, thereby creating a new rhetorical situation, and, of course, a different learning situation with different effects on the learner depending on which element, if any, was dominant.

The view presented here is that all language, including written school language, is a rhetorical, communicative act, a social interaction and that authoring and reading is a rhetorical situation, an interaction between author, reader/learner, text and the world. Authors' and readers' tasks are both complex, creative processes where meaning is made rather than transferred; good meaning -- making and communication depend on good structures (mutually shared schemata for what a good structure is).

B. Structuring, Perspectives, Roles, and the Author/Reader Relationship

Reading and writing are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing processes because both involve the structuring of meaning (Elkind, 1976). Both authors and readers structure ideas in forms such as paragraphs, stories and essays. The point of providing students with opportunities to structure ideas through the writing process according to Ribovich (1977) is that readers get a firm notion of what idea structuring really is when they have to do it. They acquire and develop schemata for idea structuring, which they can transfer from the writing situation to the reading situation. With these schemata, they can uncover the author's structure more successfully or, in case of author disorganization or lack of structure, they can mentally generate their own structure and impose it on the text.

Schema research has attempted to explain how a person's knowledge of the topic influences text comprehension and recall. Two clear findings have emerged from this work. First, readers recall more information when they take on a particular perspective such as a burglar, wrestler or music expert (Anderson, 1977; Anderson & Pichert, 1978) or when they have a higher degree of content knowledge (Voss, Vesonder, & Spillich, 1980). The second is that

readers will make inferences consistent with their perspective (Owens, Dafoe, & Bower, 1979; Spiro, 1977, 1980).

The notion of taking the persepctive of an expert, taking another's point of view, or role playing may help explain why those students who become experts at composing different genres and discourse types might comprehend better. The skilled reader would take on the role of the author, activating schemata throughout the entire text. By taking the author's perspective, the reader would recognize author intention, tone, and style, be more sensitive to both audience and situation, and form intelligent hypotheses about structures and content from minimal text cues. The reader who "becomes the author" as he or she reads will be sensitive to the constraints and conventions of the various prose types and to the variables that make a difference in the effectiveness of the message and that particular prose type.

"Role" denotes from a point of view (as in "to assume a role") and activity (as in "to play a role in a drama"). For better learning, authors and readers need to assume and play complementary roles. Kroll (1977) sees the reader and writer as complementary roles. Based on Britton's four-stage model of writing, pre-writing and writing can be viewed as the writer's role; reconsidering and editing can be seen as the reader's role. Both roles can be developed with exercises based on reading instruction. Scanning can be used to show the author/reader the need for highlighting the topic and signaling the subtopics with markers when writing. Teaching reading survey skills in order to see the need for stating a thesis clearly and placing it in the appropriate position, can help writers write more readable prose, and getting meaning from titles by skimming can help writers create meaningful titles.

The notion of contract as it relates to the role of writers, the role of readers, and the nature of reader-writer relationships is discussed by Tierney and LaZansky (1980). Both readers and writers have rights and responsibilities; in other words, they have a contractual agreement, an agreement which defines the roles of each in relation to the text. Tierney and LaZansky argue that whenever an author or reader fails to abide by the terms of the contract, meaning suffers. A writer has a responsibility to be sincere, informative, relevant, clear, and to establish points of contact between the communication and the reader's experiences. He or she must respect the audience and attend to its needs. A reader has responsibilities, too. He or she must assume that a writer communicates for a certain purpose to a certain audience, implying that it is important to consider for what and for whom a particular text is intended. Although the author makes a contract with the reader and the reader makes a contract with the author, this does not mean both agree to the same terms. Each may have different purposes, but a robust text can support wide audiences and diverse reader purposes. The text, rather than bearing meaning explicity, represents meaning or gives clues to meaning. The author must provide enough clues for the reader, and the reader must appropriately use the author's clues.

In terms of schemata and structure, authors have a responsibility to develop and elaborate schemata for the various text structures so they can choose the appropriate structure for the purpose of the text and the reader. Some structures are more appropriate than others for readers, depending on the reader's stage of development. Psycholinguists have found that some sentence contructions are more difficult for poor readers to process than others (Davison, 1981). On the discourse level, Meyer (1979) found that comparative/

contrast text structure was better comprehended and recalled than a list structure for ninth graders. Authors also have a responsibility to acquire and fine-tune schemata for structural cues -- the devices that signal the structure to the reader. Poor readers need these structural cues to uncover the author's structure and meaning (Marshall & Glock, 1979). Readers, too, have responsibilities for acquiring, selecting, and maintaining across sentences and text units those schemata for structure and structural clues that will help them comprehend. Authors and readers must agree to a structural contract for an effective author-reader interaction.

Collins and Gentner (1980) give an example of writers violating their structural contract. One of the most important objectives in writing is enticingness, and suspense is often used to achieve this objective. Desiring to meet the enticingness objective, novice writers in science attempt to keep their readers in suspense in order to surprise them with the conclusion. They give an incorrect view in their introduction and their true view of the topic in their conclusion. Most readers have expectations about the structure of scientific articles, however, especially if they are also authors, and do not expect to see an incorrect view defended and thus are put off by the writing. Poor readers might accept the incorrect view as that of the writer and become confused. The use of suspense in a scientific article is a violation of the author's structural contract with the reader.

When a reader imposes a structure on a text different from the author's structure, or reads informative texts for pleasure, he deprives the text of its genre. Reading a pleasure text for the sake of information, for example, turns it into a document (Ryan, 1979). Readers, like authors, may violate the author-reader contract for structure or purpose with serious consequences resulting for the author-reader relationship.

Researchers working out of a schema-theoretic tradition have focused on the structure of knowledge that must be analyzed, rather than on the textual, gestalt-like properties that can only be felt (Spiro, 1980). When a writer engages in the act of composition, his experience of that act has diverse aspects. One aspect is the possibility of a verbal description of the compsing process. Flower and Hayes (1979) studied such descriptions in their subjects' protocols. Verbal descriptions of the act of composing, however, miss the "existential" aspect of the act, for they do not include what the experience of writing a short story, a play, a technical description, or an argumentative essay feels like. Each genre, each text type, has its own "texture," "color," "voice," or "flavor" that a writer feels when he experiences the act of writing it, a general impression of the whole. Barlett (1932) called these summary feelings "attitudes" and gave them a central place in the constructive process after noting that his subjects' recalls were justifications of their general impressions of the whole (their "attitudes").

It might be possible that authors who have previously experienced various text types by feeling them will be better readers and recallers of those same text types. The possibility is based on Spiro's proposal (1980) that these holistic "signatures" of past events precede and facilitate comprehension and retrieval of detailed information (this might be a definition essay, but it just doesn't feel right). If readers took on the role of authors, they could read more efficiently since the summary feelings are single units or chunks, thought of all at the same time and rapidly, allowing for better use of their limited processing ability.

Efficiency could also result because, although it is not possible to think analytically about two things at the same time, it may be possible to think about one thing while simultaneously feeling several others. If the content of the text required analytical thinking by the reader, but the structure of the text did not because he had experienced the structure before as an author, processing could occur more effectively with the cognitive and affective schemata working in concert.

Until teachers understand the nature of author/reader relationships, they cannot plan the kinds of teaching and learning opportunities that they and their students need in order to master craftsmen of constructing meaning. This is a necessary first step in developing the required control of technique, form, and relationships.

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